

Note on

The Political Situation in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe political situation looks set to remain tense towards the build up to the Presidential and Parliamentary elections scheduled for 29 March 2008.

The recent visit by South African President Thabo Mbeki in January 2008 was an attempt to find a peaceful solution to the ongoing political tension between the Zimbabwean African National Union- Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) led by Mr. Morgan Tsvangirai. President Mbeki attempted to finalise an agreement between the two parties to ensure free and fair elections in March. But upon arrival, tension was accentuated as the MDC intensified its demand for a new constitution ahead of the March elections and called for anti-government protests.

The Zimbabwean government's decision was that it would not agree to opposition demands, to postpone the elections to June 2008 and to implement a transitional constitution before elections, which would introduce a series of pro-democracy reforms. The government apparently is setting the stage for a showdown with the MDC. The brief detention of the MDC leader by the police, the economic crisis and shortages of food and fuel, could make the challenging situation in the country degenerate into political crisis of larger proportions.

In addition, Mr. Simba Makoni, a senior ZANU-PF member, former Minister of Finance and ex- Secretary General of SADC, had declared himself as independent candidate for the Presidential election. This in effect amounted to confrontation with the President Robert Mugabe. It is an important development in the political landscape in Zimbabwe that could affect the outcome of the Presidential elections.

It is recommended that the African Union Commission should continue to be seized of this matter and prepared for appropriate response including, inter alia, election observation.

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